

People and the Sea: Conference Wrap-Up

by Dr. Rob van Ginkel (Center for Maritime Research)

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends:

In this concluding session of the inaugural conference of the recently established Center for Maritime Research in Amsterdam it is my privilege to make some final remarks.

The conference organisers think they can look back on three highly successful days, in which they succeeded in bringing together scholars from the South and the North, from across various social and natural science disciplines, who are dealing with a plethora of topics relating to maritime issues ranging from piracy to marinas and from pearl farming to industrial fisheries, and with research settings in all parts of the world. New contacts have been established, new alliances have been forged. We had music and the conference even inspired a composer. The broad title 'People and the Sea' certainly captured the breadth and spirit of the conference. We hope you enjoyed the sessions as much as the organisers did. Through your participation you made it all happen.

Let me briefly look back on how our concern with maritime issues came about and then move on to the future.

Looking back

For ages, human activity in inshore waters has been on such a scale that it had little impact on marine resources and that one activity interfered little with others. A number of long-term developments have led to intensified use of the world's coastal zones. For example, demographic growth, urbanisation, the expanding demand for food and natural resources, the integration of resources into markets, technological innovations, the development of marine transport and navigation, the rise of tourism and the lure of beach and sea: these and other changes have increased the human impact on coasts and oceans. Throughout the world, populations have tended to move towards, and to be increasingly concentrated in, coastal areas. The exploitation of gas and oil has helped stimulate settlement in coastal areas. The preferred siting of many industrial complexes is near major ports and the sea offers the potential of virtually unrestricted development. In many countries, there is a desire to live, or at least holiday, in the coastal area, away from inland conurbations. The increased leisure time and money available for aquatic pastimes and the decreased costs of travel have stimulated this development.

Once a domain where only fishers and sailors ventured, the sea is now increasingly being used for other purposes than fishing and navigation. This applies to the inshore zone in particular. In addition to still being important as fishing areas, coastal zones are often used intensively for other potentially intrusive activities. In many societies, the public's growing demands for entry to the inshore zone have brought about competition and conflicts between various interest groups, stakeholders and claimants over access to, allocation of and control over coastal space and resources. In addition to multiple use conflicts, intensified use of the coastal

zone can also exacerbate marine resource management problems. It is clear that as the number of resource users and the types and extent of resource use in the coastal zone multiply, interdependencies increase. There are conflicts of interest when activities interact. We are dealing with complex situations where

- different uses may be mutually incompatible;
- one activity may be damaging to some interests but beneficial to others;
- some activities cause effects elsewhere and are themselves affected by different activities;
- others cause effects without themselves being interfered with;
- still other activities only suffer interference without themselves causing any effects on others;
- and where different uses of different user-groups are regulated through different management regimes.

It is obvious that coastal and ocean planning which involves all stakeholders and integrates all options is a preferable way to manage competing uses and interests. In this connection, it is important (i) to identify the vested interests and relative stakes of different user groups and claimants and (ii) to understand the ways in which people, resources and institutions in multi-stakeholder contexts are embedded within webs of economic, social and cultural relations at levels ranging from the household to the global. Marine resource use and marine environmental issues typically transcend nation-state boundaries and a meld of local, national and international actors have defined themselves as stakeholders with regard to use rights over marine space and resources. It is precisely this fact which can lead to a clash of interests between the various claimants and stakeholders. In many cases, there will be power hierarchies or structural asymmetries of stakeholder groups and individuals, whose socio-economic and cultural statuses vary. In negotiation processes, some may be included while others are excluded. The problem of participation, representation and co-operation in decision-making and management processes has important consequences for the possibility of disputes and dispute regulation. The interests of local people often clash with state-imposed policies and rules concerning the uses of the inshore zone. For example, many governments favour economically stronger sectors like aquaculture, tourism or oil exploitation over economically weaker ones like inshore fishing interests. Fishers risk being alienated from the resources they traditionally exploit and their alienation undermines the legitimacy of measures in multi-use management contexts. Management measures should therefore take into account socio-economic and cultural differences among different types of users.

Looking ahead

All this is easier said than done. And that is why we have explicitly asked our keynote speakers - Biliana Cicin-Sain, John Kurien, and Jean-Philippe Platteau - to set agendas for future research. So it is time to look ahead a bit. I will not attempt to summarise their presentations, but will highlight some of the things they said.

Professor Cicin-Sain emphasised that Integrated Coastal Management should lead to sustainable development of coastal and marine areas, reduction of vulnerability and maintenance of ecological processes and biological diversity. An integrative approach is necessary to

overcome fragmentation in sectoral management and jurisdiction levels. In her opinion, the social sciences could have a greater impact on ICM issues, but they should focus more on "big issues", "speak to power" and forge cross-national alliances. We should further avoid "desegregating trends".

In his thought-provoking presentation, professor Kurien pointed out that in terms of human numbers, we need a tropical majority world perspective and more sensitivity to the contexts, needs and abilities of the South. He gave us some new issues and concepts to ponder on and stressed that in future research, a dynamic perspective is needed, and that we have to take into account diversity. International research co-operation should be a two-way process.

Professor Platteau also dealt with the influence of heterogeneity on collective action. Whereas in general heterogeneity is often regarded an impediment to organise collectively, in the case of Senegalese fishermen many differences (like skill heterogeneity) do prove an obstacle to collective action, only one (wealth inequality) may be the exception to the rule. How to deal with diversity in policy and management is one of the main issues for the social sciences.

Closing remarks

In an increasingly globalising world, it is more evident than ever that problems are transnational and that we have to tackle them through a concerted effort. Ecological, economic, social and political interdependencies have but reinforced the impact of external factors on local-level communities. One only need to think of pollution, global warming, rising sea-levels, and international conflicts over access to and use (or non-use) of space and resources to realise this. There is a real danger that the North will export its problems to the South. We can already observe that in the fisheries, member states of the European Union attempt to obtain more fishing rights in for example Africa. More or less simultaneously, we see in the South instances of the import of Northern-style technologies and management regimes which may in local settings be extremely maladaptive because there are considerable differences in institutional contexts.

Heterogeneity, complexity, (non-linear) dynamics and contingencies have to be taken into account in any kind of governance structure. Yet, such factors are often considered 'nasty complications', simplified or ignored altogether. Dealing with ecological, economic and socio-political situations and developments 'as if' they are simple, homogeneous, static and predictable provides for easier management tools. However, simple policy is not necessarily good policy and serious complications may be the end result. I think it is one of the challenges for future social science research to incorporate such contextual factors in models that may serve as input for policy and management of marine and coastal resources. To do that, it is necessary to determine the ways people understand and relate to their natural and social environments and how they bring about and respond to ecological, economic, political and social change whether from within or from without a predefined entity. Yes, funding agencies, as always we need more money for research.

Let me now turn to the Center of Maritime Research's plans for the future. For one thing, we intend to organise a follow-up conference in Amsterdam in 2003. We will keep you posted on that and you are kindly invited to participate again. Secondly, the journal *Maritime Anthropological Studies*, which ceased publication in 1993, will be revived as *Maritime Studies*. The first issue will appear early next year, bringing together some of the conference papers. We

will also consider publishing books on specific themes dealt with during the conference. Lastly, we have plans to establish an Association for Maritime Social Scientists (with the provisional acronym AMASS): we certainly hope to amass support for such an association. Any suggestions you would like to make regarding the conference, the journal, other publications or the association are extremely welcome. So don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

On behalf of the conference committee, I would finally like to thank you once more for making the conference a tremendous success.

* * *